

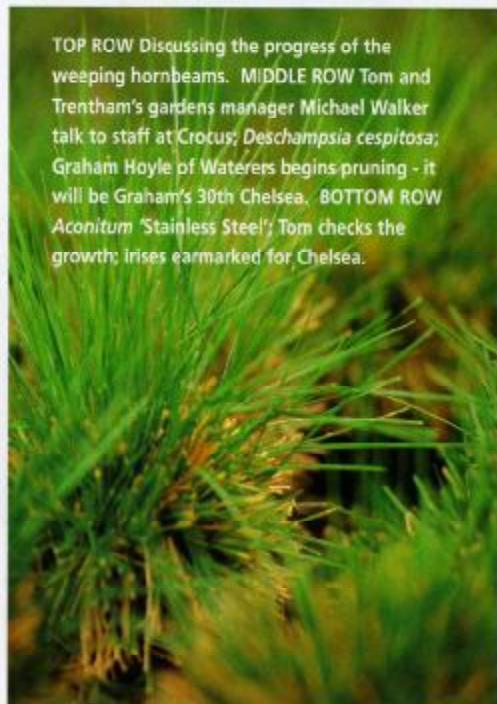
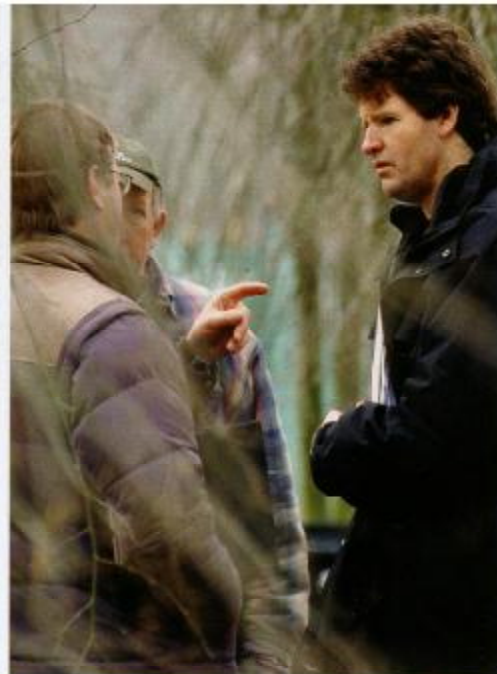
TOP ROW, FROM LEFT Designer Tom Stuart-Smith deep in thought; fennel grown specially for Tom's garden; Tom with Mark Fane of Crocus, who has overseen the growing of the plants. BOTTOM ROW, FROM LEFT Plants with a ticket to Chelsea; the hornbeam tunnel; pots of trimmed *Iris sibirica* 'Flight of Butterflies'.

The making of a show garden



For award winning designer Tom Stuart-Smith, the build up to Chelsea started a year ago. Here's his behind-the-scenes account of this year's Laurent-Perrier Garden, inspired by Trentham

PHOTOGRAPHS WILLIAM SHAW WORDS AND ILLUSTRATION TOM STUART-SMITH



TOP ROW Discussing the progress of the weeping hornbeams. MIDDLE ROW Tom and Trentham's gardens manager Michael Walker talk to staff at Crocus; *Deschampsia cespitosa*; Graham Hoyle of Waterers begins pruning - it will be Graham's 30th Chelsea. BOTTOM ROW *Aconitum 'Stainless Steel'*; Tom checks the growth; Irises earmarked for Chelsea.



I started working on the restoration plan for Trentham in Staffordshire, seven years ago, and in spring 2004 the restoration of the garden finally got under way. In the first major phase, I am replanting the main parterre and Dutch designer Piet Oudolf is creating two flanking borders, over 200m long. The Italian Garden, designed by Charles Barry for the Duke of Sutherland, is nearly 10 acres. The scale is immense and is actually the antithesis of a small Chelsea Flower Show garden. *Trentham is 2 miles from Junction 15 on the M6. www.trenthamleisure.co.uk*

February 2004

Anthony Glossop, the head of St Modwen (joint owners of Trentham), and the brains behind the Trentham project, suggests the idea of a garden at Chelsea to publicise the opening of the first major phase of the garden in 2005. I am keen on the idea, but wonder how I can possibly do something on such a tiny plot that can evoke the scale and history of Trentham.

March 2004

An idea for the garden starts to emerge. It has to express the grand classicism of Barry's original garden and must have dramatic scale.

The central area will be devoted to big sweeps of perennial planting. These will be divided by rivers of grass, which spread over the garden like a net; a direct translation of the pattern of rivers in the Trent Valley.

I would love to use one of Barry's stone seats, but the originals are 10m across! We will just have to make a Chelsea sized one.

One of the remarkable features of Trentham is the Trellis walk that

runs along a slightly elevated bank, giving views over the garden. I've seen a spectacular tunnel of weeping hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus 'Perulula'*) in a German nursery, which has the same proportions. This could run along one side of the Chelsea garden, perhaps with a statue at the end.

The garden wouldn't be Trentham without any classical statuary and ornament. Most of the originals from Trentham have disappeared and need to be replaced. My idea is to get some made to use at Chelsea before they go to Trentham.

The garden must have water. There is water everywhere at Trentham, from the fountain basins (30m across) to the river Trent and the 80 acre Capability Brown lake.

May 2004

I show my proposal to Anthony, who is very enthusiastic. When I tell him how much it is going to cost (think: a small semi in the home counties), he doesn't flinch. A month later, we have persuaded Laurent-Perrier to be joint sponsors of the garden. All very satisfactory.

June 2004

I've submitted proposals to the RHS so that we can be allocated a space. Mark Fane is growing all the herbaceous plants at Crocus' nursery in Sunningdale. Kurosh Davis, who has worked with me for eight years, has calculated all the paving sizes down to the nearest millimetre, and I have approached Cliveden Conservation about the possibility of making the new urns.

November 2004

Anthony suggests that a bust of the second Duke might be a good feature for the end of the hornbeam tunnel. They bought it at auction a few years back and it is quite big (like everything at Trentham). I pay a visit. The bust is vast; 2m high and 1.7m across. Magnificent, but useless. Need to look again. An early 19th statue of Hygeia, a Greek goddess of health, is another candidate. In the photos, she looks good, despite the peeling paint. I ask Michael Walker, gardens manager at Trentham, to check. He reports back with the dire news that, since the photo was taken, vandals have broken off and stolen her head.

December 2004

The weeping hornbeam arches are delivered to ISS Waterers in Surrey, who will do the landscaping. They are spectacular, but I had forgotten quite how bushy they are. We will

have to prune heavily if anybody is going to be able to walk down the tunnel, let alone see Hygeia.

January 2005

The pace is beginning to hot up now. We are commissioning a series of stone relief carvings by Norfolk sculptor Gary Breeze. They will make a series on the wall and give clues to the historical development of Trentham. It's hard to strike a balance between being too literal and too abstract. Anthony wants more information; Gary wants more symbolism. Somehow, we reach a happy compromise.

February 2005

Cliveden Conservation collects Hygeia from Trentham. A new head is to be carved in marble. Tim Knox, of the National Trust is advising on the decorative detail of the urns. At Crocus, I meet with Michael and Mark and we check on the plants' progress. The plants for the garden are beginning to show signs of growth. Graham Hoyle is pruning the hornbeam, the stonework has been ordered from Italy and Yorkshire and Gary Breeze is starting carving.

March 2005

It is a relief now that all the big decisions have been made in time. There is a lot that can still go wrong, but after a year of steady work we are prepared for the show. Let's hope!



LAURENT-PERRIER CHELSEA READER OFFER

In celebration of its participation in Chelsea Flower Show 2005, Laurent-Perrier is offering three *The English Garden* readers the chance to win a pair of tickets each to the show on Thursday 26 May to see the Laurent-Perrier Garden for themselves. Following the show, the winners will be treated to a Laurent-Perrier champagne dinner for two at Chelsea's finest modern Indian restaurant, The Painted Heron. Since opening in 2002, the restaurant has received critical acclaim for its innovative interpretation of contemporary Indian cuisine and intricately flavoured dishes. Our lucky winners will enjoy a bottle of the deliciously fresh and light Laurent-Perrier Brut Non-Vintage with their meal.

To enter, send your name, address and telephone number to The English Garden/Laurent-Perrier Offer, PO Box 5010, Yelvertoft, Northants NN6 6ZB. Closing date: 9 May 2005. Winners will be informed by Friday 13 May.

For details of Laurent-Perrier champagne: www.laurent-perrier.co.uk The Painted Heron: 020 7351 5232; www.thepaintedheron.co.uk